



PROGRAM NEWS

United States Agency for International Development

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**USAID/Nicaragua
Development Program
1998-2003
(U.S. Millions of Dollars)**

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| <i>Rule of Law and Good Governance</i> | 43.6 |
| <i>Small Producers</i> | 47.0 |
| <i>Natural Resources</i> | 14.0 |
| <i>Healthy Families</i> | 55.0 |
| <i>Primary Education</i> | 17.5 |
| <i>Food Aid</i> | 55.0 |
| TOTAL | US\$ 232.1 |



Lighting up Health Centers with USAID-Funded Solar Energy Plants

In the town of Mulukuku, the lights go off at 10 pm every night. Unfortunately medical emergencies do not respect energy curfews. So the medical staff of this backwater village often delivered babies and attended patients as best they could by candlelight.

Now, through a USAID-funded project the Mulukuku health post, located about 240 km northeast of Managua, has lights 24 hours a day. The \$155,000 project, implemented by Prosalud and the National Rural Electrification Cooperative Association (NRECA), installed solar power plants in 81 health facilities. The solar power plants are located in the most remote communities of the country in the departments of Matagalpa, Jinotega



With the installation of solar energy, medical staff can now provide health care and emergency service 24 hours a day.

and Madriz. These areas were also the most affected by Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

Easily set up within a day, the equipment includes solar panels, batteries, surge regulators, energy converters, inverters and other devices. The panels, installed on the roof of the health centers, use sunlight to recharge, eliminating the need for costly fuel or electrical power. The project also provided training to the population on the use and maintenance of the equipment.

Medical staff now have all the energy they need by activating the solar energy system through a simple switch installed inside the health post. The solar power plants not only provide illumination, but

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New housing for medical staff and solar energy power plants have helped improve health care in remote areas like Jucuapa Abajo in the northern department of Matagalpa.

Lighting up Health Centers....

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also allow health centers to refrigerate vaccines, disinfect medical instruments and connect electric water pumps.

Medical staff report that the new solar panel plants are already helping to save lives.

At the Mulukuku health post, Dr. Indiana Paiz, in charge of emergencies, recently worked through the night to save the life of a patient who had swallowed poison. "Without electricity, it would have been impossible to care for that patient," said Paiz.

Medical personnel in other health posts agree that the solar energy systems have improved medical care. A nurse in the San Pedro del Norte Health post said that since the installation of the photovoltaic system response to night emergencies has improved significantly.

"Before, if there was an emergency at night, we normally couldn't do anything until the morning. Now, we can give patients immediate attention any time of day because we have energy all the time," she said.

Solar energy systems have also been installed in medical personnel housing. USAID financed the construction of the housing to help staff health centers in remote, isolated areas. Before, doctors and



With just a flip of the switch, this health center now has all the energy it needs from solar panels, mounted on the roof, to light up the center, refrigerate vaccines and sterilize medical instruments.

nurses would have to move in with a family in the community or find somewhere else to live. The housing was often inadequate and staff, turnover was high.

Now, doctors and nurses are living in new, comfortable hous-

ing with running water and lights and are available to patients 24 hours a day. A doctor at the Jucuapa Abajo health center, located in the northern department of Matagalpa, said that the solar energy system has lifted the spirit of the whole community.

Said the physician: "The community and even the medical personnel were apathetic about the health clinic here. But now, we see a big change. Everyone is working together in planning how to take advantage of the equipment and give it the best use and maintenance."



USAID funded the installation of solar energy plants in 81 health facilities at a cost of \$155,000, which included training for the population in the use and maintenance of the equipment.

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Nurse at the San Pedro del Norte Health Post



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